MYSTERY OF SHACKLED MAN

Died Without Revealing His Identity, But the Ex-Sheriff Spoiled a Very Romantic Theory.

"A LOVE of adventure and a hazy hope of acquiring fortune brought me from the north to the south in '59," said the ruddy-faced narrator, as he replenished his yellow-bowled pipe from the tobacco jar. The half-dozen kindred spirits about the table in the smoking room settled down attentively.

"I was young then, and am not decrepit even now—and my cold, Lake George region blood was set tingling in my veins to beat the band by my first winter in New Orleans. New Orleans I conceived to be the most seductive community on earth, its luxury-loving men and women, its gay society and its care-free, money-plentiful social circles completely captivated me. I had never been about the world much then, and even now, after knowing something of the gayeties of Paris, the somber, leisurely, but enthralling charm of London, and the subdued yet luminous entrancements of Naples, Rome and Venice, I am still constrained to believe that New Orleans just before the war was, save in size only, the most fascinating center of sweet idleness on earth. So completely captivated was I by the social life of the city, its brave yet gentile and generous men and its elegant and accomplished women, that my wintery northern prejudices against slavery, and some other peculiar southern institutions were entirely melted. I became a southerner in all things, except perhaps in the soft accents, and, as is customary with zealous converts, was more radical than the radicals themselves.

"The following spring I floated up the river to Memphis, with nothing particular in view except to 'turn up something' and begin my career of fortune building, my winter at New Orleans having depleted my financial resources. Soon after reaching the Bluff City I was invited to join a fishing and hunting party, which was making up to visit Lake Francis, an estuary of the St. Francis river, in Arkansas, some sixty miles in the interior from Memphis. At that time there was practically no civilization or population in that portion of the state of Arkansas. The forests were full of wild things and the waters alive with fish. In the region of St. Francis big game abounded and the lake was by long odds the finest fishing opportunity it has ever been my fortune to meet.

"The party numbered ten or twelve men, including two slaves who were taken along to do the work. In the vicinity of our camping place a large plantation had been opened, the only clearing on the river for fifty miles in either direction. The place was tilled by black men under the care of white overseers, the owner living in Memphis. Log cabins of one room each for the negro families and log cabins of three rooms each for the overseers sufficed for the residential quarters, but the proprietor, desiring to spend more time at the place, had given orders for a brick dwelling and negroes had been put to work making bricks.

"The brick kiln was located out of the bottom, some two miles away from the farm. Overlooking the plant was a high bluff, rising some fifty feet from the waters of the St. Francis river. In the face of the bluff, half way between the summit and the mean water level, were a number of caves, which had been formed in ages past by the action of flood waters. These caves, or caverns, in the face of the cliff, had never been explored, it being believed that, in addition to their almost inaccessible location, they were inhabited by 'varmints,' snakes and other unpleasant species of nature's kingdom.

"A few days after our arrival a sheriff, or deputy, came up the river in a row boat, a negro doing the rowing, and stopped at our camp. He was on the lookout for a runaway negro who had escaped from a plantation down the stream some fifty miles or more. He had learned that the fugitive was in hiding somewhere in our vicinity and that he was being fed at night by the negroes at the brick yard, who surreptitiously, as they supposed, left food for him on a stump near their quarters. Being a 'bad nigger' with a record, the officer asked for volunteers to assist him in the capture. It was his intention to post a guard after nightfall and 'pick up' the runaway when he came into the clearing. The glow from the burning kiln lighted up a considerable circle of space. I was posted on the summit of the bluff before mentioned, with instructions to watch the vicinity of the kiln closely and when the fugitive black should venture out from concealment into the circle of light to fire my pistol as a signal to close in.

"I took my stand under a small tree with thick foliage and soon grew tired on my feet. Then I sat down with my back against the trunk of the tree. I sat motionless for an hour, perhaps, and finally dozed.

"I slept very lightly for an hour or more. Half awake, I was startled by a voice near me. Opening my eyes, all alert in a moment, I saw within a few feet of me a tall figure of a man—not a black, slinking wretch in rags, but a tall, dignified patriarchal appearing individual, with a tangled mass of gray hair and a flowing, cascade-like beard, pure white, except for stains of earth and soot and tangles of strands, which had apparently taken color from the soil. He was talking softly to himself in French, my New Orleans residence having given me some understanding of that tongue. I could not catch his words clearly.

"He was in the raggedest rags imaginable, hatless, shoeless. His eyes burned luminously and his face, though almost concealed by his beard, was livid in the reflected light. He leaned on a long staff or cane, a piece of sapling he had taken from the forest, and his frame shook as with the palsy, though the native dignity of the man was unmistakable. He was gazing intently, abstractedly, at the blazing brick kiln below, evidently undecided as to his movements or purpose. Scarcely knowing what to do, I cocked my pistol. Immediately his hands went up and, facing the direction from which the sound came, he spoke again, excitedly, in French. I was not sufficiently acquainted with that language, and he was too agitated in his speech, for me to understand him, and, making no response, he spoke in broken English, saying: 'Don't shoot me; I desire to surrender and accompany you.'

"Recovering my self-possession, I approached him, pistol in hand, and laid hold of his right arm. 'Who are you?' said I. 'It matters not,' he replied. 'I am a fugitive, and have been such for years. I am old, and past the period when men are dangerous to their fellows. I am sick with the fever, and, realizing the near approach of death, I have come from my concealment to ask succor.'

"'Come,' said I. Slowly he hobbled down the slope of the hill toward the brick camp. His steps seemed strangely slow and his limbs heavily combered. Running my left hand down one of his legs I found what I expected—a heavy chain. One end was secured around his leg above the knee by a piece of pliant bark; the other end was riveted into a heavy iron band two inches wide and nearly one inch thick, which circled his left ankle. The band's ends had been welded together after being put on the limb. So long had it been in place that the flesh marks were half an inch deep, though long healed and with no signs of soreness. A later examination revealed similar marks on the other ankle. Evidently he had, by some means, freed his right limb, but found it impossible to remove the shackle from the other. The chain, with its band and wrought links, weighed twelve pounds, as afterward determined. He had, after countless solitary and soul-racking attempts to remove the encumbrance, finally ceased his efforts and resigned himself to its discomforts, keeping the links bound to his leg above the knee, under his shreds of trousers, by the means mentioned.

"At the camp he was given such attentions as our means afforded. To all questions as to his identity, the length of his stay in the wilds and the prison from which he escaped, he refused replies. He directed us to his principal habitation—a flood-worn fissure in the river bluff, near where I met him so strangely. We searched for his path, and finally succeeded in reaching the hole in the wall which was his home. Evidently it had been occupied for years. There was rude fishing tackle, a clumsy bow and arrows, but no furniture or comforts. He had subsisted on fish, taken at night, and small game which he shot with his crude weapons. A pile of acorns and the stains of wild berries about the cave showed what his bread and dessert had been.

"Despite all that could be done for him, his fever raged, and his condition became worse hour by hour. But for the magnificent physical frame and constitution of the man disease must have consumed him years before the time of our venture.

"In moments of delirium he would shout military commands, in French; deliver orations bearing every evidence of eloquence, and his accompanying gestures betrayed a grace and national characteristics that could have belonged only to a Frenchman of the highest order. During the night succeeding his surrender, he died. A grave was dug on the bluff near his habitation, and clothed in a suit supplied by one of our party, he was buried, decently and with respect, his cruel chain having been removed by the slave blacksmith of the adjacent plantation. The iron thong was carried back to Memphis, in the hope that it would help to establish the identity of its wearer, but little effort was made in that direction.

"That the man was at one time a French military chieftain or a statesman, or both, is certain. He gave every indication of inherent gentility and education, even under such circumstances as those in which we saw him. He was undoubtedly a political prisoner of importance, possibly of royal blood. It is sure that his escape was grateful, as he chose the fearful solitudes and the rigorous hardships of the wilderness and chains rather than risk any chance of detection by coming in contact with men, however remote from the scene of his crime or imprisonment. There is much reason to believe that he was never in prison in America. Possibly he had been deported from France to some foreign penal colony, and had made his escape and lost himself near the center of the North American continent. He probably arrived at New Orleans aboard some craft of doubtful character from South America, and made his way inland afoot or afloat.

"While in Paris some years later I made some investigations on my own account and at my personal expense. I found what I believed to have been a warm clew, leading up to the seat of government, but I was incontinently shut out from the archives by the guarding functionary, who had first taken my money for affording me the privilege of inspection. Evidently he became alarmed, fearing some developments contrary to the best interests of the established order of things.

"I have regretted ever since the day of the occurrence that I neglected until too late to push investigations to the extent of determining the true character of the man and establishing his identity. That he was an extraordinarily imposing personage in the flower of his activity I am convinced, and a solution of the problem involved in his personality would doubtless furnish materials for a sensation of greater magnitude than the Dreyfus episode. I believe, in short, that our singular friend was of royal lineage, and that he was compelled to suffer as much for the accident of his exalted birth as for the crime or crimes he was evidently guilty of, or suffered for."

"But the sheriff didn't catch the runaway nigger that night,' chimed in the man with sunburnt whiskers.

"That's so," said the first speaker. "How'd you know he didn't?"

"I was him—the sheriff," replied he of the bay-colored facial adornments, "and I remember every word of the story you have just told these gents and me. You have it down mighty near right, except in placing the old man. I happened to find out about him later. He was just a leery old loon who was brung up in N'Erleens. He never seen an inch of France in his life, and had more sense on his deathbed than ever before in all his days. He was continerly in trouble at N'Erleens, and they finally loant him to a sea island cotton planter off Savanny, who worked him in the cotton fields. Them shackles was hammered on to him by a convict blacksmith. The old rascal escaped, nobody never knowed how, and worked his way to where he was found. He was 'looney' most of the time and made wild talks about being some big gun or other, from forren ports. As he got older he got 'funnier' in his head, and finally separated himself from other folks and lived in his cave by the water, like a mus'rat."

"I am glad to see you again, Mr. Sheriff, but I don't thank you for spoiling a theory of thirty years' standing,' said the narrator, opening the door.

"Sorry to interfere," said the other, "but facts is facts, and had ought to always be told."

"Closing the door with an impatient jerk, the man with the royal theory remarked ill-humoredly to his companion, as they walked away, that he had met conscienceless prevaricators in many lands, but that fellow in there with the broom sedge side whiskers is entitled to the medal for bad-thanner mendacity. 'That fellow ever a sheriff!' grumbled the story teller. 'Why, he never saw the time he could arrest a gentleman's respect!'"—Galveston News.

INDIAN SOLDIER OF FORTUNE

(London Leader.)

THERE died in Helhi the other day a man whose name brings back one of the most exciting chapters on Anglo-Indian history. Mr. James Skinner, whose death is reported, was the grandson of Colonel James Skinner, C. B., the half-caste who carved out with his sword a career in his native land, and did not lose the respect of either natives or Europeans in doing it. It is a tribute to his valor and his virtues that he who belonged to the despised Eurasians gained such a hold alike on his mother's and his father's race. "Iskander Sahib" the Mahrattas called him, this name being pronounced "Iskinner," and then affectionately altered to "Iskander," in proud comparison with Alexander the Great, in compliment to his valor.

James Skinner was the son of a Scotch lieutenant in the service of the Honorable East India company, who formed a connection with a Rajput lady, the daughter of a landowner, who was taken prisoner in one of our wars. There were six children, but the liaison ended tragically when James Skinner was a boy of 12. His father decided that his three daughters should be sent to school as Europeans. Their mother committed suicide in despair at this violation of the honor of a Rajputani, but the girls were befriended by the European community, and all married officers in the company's service.

Began as Ensign.

Lieutenant Skinner's means were small, his family were brought up meagerly, and James Skinner, who was the second son, was apprenticed to a printer in Calcutta when he was 17. He stayed three days in the composing room, and then ran away. His godfather, a British officer, took an interest in his military ambitions and procured him the rank of ensign in the native army of the Maharajah Scindia, which was then under the command of the famous Savoyard, General de Boigne, and officered by a crowd of adventurers from all the nations of Europe. Skinner soon distinguished himself by defending the rear during a retreat in one of Scindia's wars, and General Perron, the Frenchman, who succeeded De Boigne, made him a lieutenant. In all the desperate fighting between Scindia and Holkar, Skinner, who was chiefly employed under a gallant but melodramatic Hanoverian officer named Pohlmann, bore his part. At one point we find him with his horsemen riding down a battery of artillery, sabering the gunners and taking the guns.

At another the fortune of war changes and he is almost overwhelmed by a charge of 10,000 wild Ratthore cavalry, only saving his life by taking refuge under a tumbril. Then, after the battle of Jaipur, we find him with an eye on the "loot"—always a weakness of the soldier of fortune. The defeated rajah's pavillion—"the most beautiful thing I ever saw," he says—was radiant with embroidery and crimson velvet. Entering, everything that met his eye was of gold or silver. "Opening one of the rajah's baskets, I found two golden idols with diamond eyes, which I immediately secured in my bosom." Among the other trinkets he carried off was a brass fish, which he found the Mahratta General very anxious to relieve him of. He gave it up and then learned that it was the "fish of dignities," the imperial ensign of honor bestowed by the king of Delhi upon the Rajah. But "Iskander Sahib" held fast to the golden idols with diamond eyes, and received a handsome additional present for giving up the brass fish.

A Stricken Field Incident.

Not long after he was attacked in a minor campaign near Tonk by an overwhelming force. His men began to bolt, and at last he was left with one field piece and about 300 stalwarts. Again and again the enemy's cavalry charged, and at last Skinner was felled by a matchlock bullet in the thigh and all his faithful men cut down. It was 3 a. m. next day when Skinner regained his senses. He had been stripped of all but his pantaloons, round him were dead and wounded native officers, the latter moaning for water and feebly throwing stones to keep off the jackals, which were already tearing the dead with their obscene claws. On one side of him was a sabahdar with his leg shot off at the knee, on the other a jemsdar with a pike thrust through his body. All one hot day they lay there unable to move. All one long night they watched in the cold light of the moon the death agonies of the weakest.

At last, on the second morning, there came an old man and a woman with a basket and a pot of water, giving to every wounded man a piece of bread and a drink of water. Then came a poignant scene. The subahdar was a high-caste Rajput, the woman was a Chumar (one of the lowest castes), and he would receive neither water nor bread from her. Skinner, whose own mother's story had told him of the fidelity of the Rajput to their caste, tried in vain to alter his determination. The subahdar replied that he had only a few hours more of suffering to endure, and that he preferred to die unpolluted. It is pleasant to add that the subahdar lived after all, for a neighboring rajah sent for the wounded and gave them food and water. Skinner afterward found out the poor outcast woman's name and sent her 1,000 rupees.

The "Yellow Boys."

At last the Mahrattas declared war against England, and Perron, who had been in communication with Napoleon I, in the hope of establishing a French empire in India, dismissed all the English officers who remained. It was not long before he found it himself necessary to fly, and Skinner, who met him on the road, offered to go back with him and "fight for their salt." Perron refused, shouting, "No trust, no trust. Good-bye Monsieur Skinner." "Then go to the devil," retorted the young man, and each went his way. Parron returned to France with a considerable portion of his gains; Skinner entered the British service under General Lake. The defeat of the Hahratta armies at Assaye and Laswari followed, and when 2,000 of Perron's old cavalry came over to the British, Skinner was placed in command. They became known far and wide along the frontier as "Skinner's Horse," or, from their canary colored uniforms, the "Yellow Boys." At their head he was policeman and judge and general, too. The breakup of the Hahretta power had left bands of brigands in many out-of-the-way fortresses, which it was Skinner's business to disperse.

In the wonderful marches by which the Pathan adventurer, Amir Khan, was driven into Central India, and the Maharajah Holkar was chased and captured at Lahore, Skinner's "Yellow Boys" were in the front, but their example so infected the British Dragoon regiments that, with a blanket and a brass cooking pot for their sole baggage, these white troopers learned to ride neck and neck with them. Then came operations against Pindari brigands, then against Arab mercenaries in revolt at Poona, and again against the Jat State of Bhurtpore. Skinner earned the rank of lieutenant colonel in the British army and a C. B. He received large grants of land, and passed the last years of his life as an agriculturist.

In pursuance of a vow he made on the moonlit battlefield of Tonk, with the jackals prowling around his dying comrades, he built an English church in Delhi, at a cost of £20,000. His domestic habits had been oriental in character, but he died a sincere Christian in 1841, and was buried in his own church at Delhi. There the whole of his famous corps, the military officers and Europeans of Delhi, and a vast concourse of natives followed to his last resting place all that was left of the gallant and generous "Iskander Sahib."